



STATE OF WISCONSIN
Division of Hearings and Appeals

In the Matter of

Milwaukee County Department of Human Services, Petitioner

vs.

DECISION

██████████ Respondent

Case #: FOF - 174262

Pursuant to petition filed May 11, 2016, under Wis. Admin. Code §HA 3.03, and 7 C.F.R. § 273.16, to review a decision by the Milwaukee County Department of Human Services to disqualify ██████████ from receiving FoodShare benefits (FS) for a period of one year, a hearing was held on Monday, June 20, 2016 at 1:30 PM, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The issue for determination is whether the respondent committed a first offense Intentional Program Violation (IPV).

There appeared at that time the following persons:

PARTIES IN INTEREST:

Petitioner:

Department of Health Services
1 West Wilson Street, Room 651
Madison, WI 53703

By: ██████████
Milwaukee Enrollment Services
1220 W. Vliet Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53205

Respondent:

██████████
██████████
██████████

█

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:

Kenneth Duren
Division of Hearings and Appeals

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The respondent (CARES # [REDACTED]) is a resident of Milwaukee County who received FS benefits in Milwaukee County from December 1, 2012 through January 31, 2013.
2. Due to the respondent's enrollment in the FS program, the respondent was issued a QUEST card which the respondent utilized to access her monthly FS allotment provided to respondent. QUEST cards are electronic benefit transfer cards that replaced food stamp coupon booklets.
3. On or about December 3, 2012, (\$100) and again on January 3, 2013, (\$130) the respondent's QUEST card was utilized in two separate transactions involving [REDACTED]
4. [REDACTED] was a licensed vendor of the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, which enabled it to redeem QUEST cards.
5. [REDACTED] was classified as a mobile vendor and operated out of private vehicles. Between August, 2010 and January, 2013, [REDACTED] redeemed approximately \$778,000 in QUEST benefits from food stamp benefit recipients who were not purchasing food, but instead receiving cash for providing access to their QUEST benefits.
6. On or about February 15, 2013, [REDACTED], doing business as [REDACTED], pled guilty to a charge of unlawfully purchasing and redeeming FS benefits. [REDACTED] admitted that no food or groceries were ever provided by [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] in exchange for Quest benefits.
7. On May 18, 2016, the petitioner prepared an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice alleging that respondent intentionally transferred FS benefits to [REDACTED] in the total amount of \$230, in exchange for cash payment(s).
8. The respondent did not transact her QUEST card with [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] on December 3, 2012, or January 3, 2013. A person unknown did so, apparently because the petitioner left her QUEST card for use by persons caring for her children to buy food for her children while she was out of town.

DISCUSSION

An intentional program violation of the FoodShare program occurs when a recipient intentionally does the following:

1. makes a false or misleading statement, or misrepresents, conceals or withholds facts;
or
2. commits any act that constitutes a violation of the Food Stamp Act, the Food Stamp Program Regulations, or any Wisconsin statute for the purpose of using, presenting, transferring, acquiring, receiving, possessing or trafficking of FoodShare benefits or QUEST cards.

FoodShare Wisconsin Handbook, § 3.14.1; *see also* 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(c) and Wis. Stat. §§ 946.92(2).

Wisconsin statutes prohibit the intentional exchange of FS benefits for cash. The law specifically provides that to traffic food stamp program benefits means to do any of the following:

Buy, sell, steal, or otherwise accomplish the exchange of, directly, indirectly, in collusion with others, or individually, food stamp program benefits issued and accessed through the electronic benefit transfer program under s. [49.797](#), or by manual voucher and signature, for cash or other consideration that is not food.

Wis. Stat. §946.92(1)(dm); *see also*, 7 C.F.R. § 271.5(b).

An intentional program violation can be proven by a court order, a diversion agreement entered into with the local district attorney, a waiver of a right to a hearing, or an administrative disqualification hearing, *FoodShare Wisconsin Handbook*, § 3.14.1. The petitioner can disqualify only the individual found to have committed the intentional violation; it cannot disqualify the entire household. Those disqualified on grounds involving the improper transfer of FS benefits are ineligible to participate in the FoodShare program for one year for the first violation, two years for the second violation, and permanently for the third violation. Although other family members cannot be disqualified, their monthly allotments will be reduced unless they agree to make restitution within 30 days of the date that the FS program mails a written demand letter. 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(b).

In order for the petitioner to establish that an FS recipient has committed an IPV, it has the burden to prove two separate elements by clear and convincing evidence. The recipient must have: 1) committed; and 2) intended to commit a program violation per 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(e)(6). In *Kuehn v. Kuehn*, 11 Wis.2d 15 (1959), the court held that:

Defined in terms of quantity of proof, reasonable certitude or reasonable certainty in ordinary civil cases may be attained by or be based on a mere or fair preponderance of the evidence. Such certainty need not necessarily exclude the probability that the contrary conclusion may be true. In fraud cases it has been stated the preponderance of the evidence should be clear and satisfactory to indicate or sustain a greater degree of certitude. Such degree of certitude has also been defined as being produced by clear, satisfactory, and convincing evidence. Such evidence, however, need not eliminate a reasonable doubt that the alternative or opposite conclusion may be true. ...

Kuehn, 11 Wis.2d at 26.

Wisconsin Jury Instruction – Civil 205 is also instructive. It provides:

Clear, satisfactory and convincing evidence is evidence which when weighed against that opposed to it clearly has more convincing power. It is evidence which satisfies and convinces you that “yes” should be the answer because of its greater weight and clear convincing power. “Reasonable certainty” means that you are persuaded based upon a rational consideration of the evidence. Absolute certainty is not required, but a guess is not enough to meet the burden of proof. This burden of proof is known as the “middle burden.” The evidence required to meet this burden of proof must be more convincing than merely the greater weight of the credible evidence but may be less than beyond a reasonable doubt.

Further, the *McCormick* treatise states that “it has been persuasively suggested that [the clear and convincing evidence standard of proof] could be more simply and intelligibly translated to the jury if they were instructed that they must be persuaded that the truth of the contention is highly probable.” 2 *McCormick on Evidence* § 340 (John W. Strong gen. ed., 4th ed. 1992).

Thus, in order to find that an IPV was committed, the trier of fact must derive from the evidence a firm conviction as to the existence of each of the two elements even though there may be a reasonable doubt as to their existence.

In order to prove the second element, i.e., intention, there must be clear and convincing evidence that the FS recipient intended to commit the IPV. The question of intent is generally one to be determined by the trier of fact. *State v. Lossman*, 118 Wis.2d 526 (1984). There is a general rule that a person is presumed to know and intend the probable and natural consequences of his or her own voluntary words or acts. See, *John F. Jelke Co. v. Beck*, 208 Wis. 650 (1932); 31A C.J.S. Evidence §131. Intention is a subjective state of mind to be determined upon all the facts. *Lecus v. American Mut. Ins. Co. of Boston*, 81 Wis.2d 183 (1977). Thus, there must be clear and convincing evidence that the FS recipient knew that the act or omission was a violation of the FS Program but committed the violation anyway.

The respondent testified that she did not know [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], would not transact her FS benefits for cash, and did not do so on either date in question here. She also denied ever going to a mobile business. She admitted that she did leave her QUEST card with adult friends caring for her children while she was out of town, with instructions to buy food to cover their needs. She averred that she would not have condoned transacting FS benefits for cash instead of feeding her children with food bought with FS benefits.

The agency representative can only point to the fact that the QUEST card used on December 3, 2012, and again on January 3, 2013, was then assigned to the respondent and was transacted with a man who has testified in federal court that he sold no food, but only paid cash for benefits at a discounted rate.

I note that it is very troublesome that these transactions occurred a month apart. Were the respondent's children left with her children and her QUEST card for a whole month? It certainly causes one to pause in analyzing her alibi here.

This is a very close case, but the requisite evidentiary standard of clear and convincing evidence causes this case to fail. Here, I found the respondent's testimony generally credible and I believe her statements that someone else used her QUEST card in the two transactions. Thus, she cannot be said to have intended to violate the program by trafficking in FS for cash. She may have committed an ancillary violation of FS rules by giving another her QUEST card and PIN to transact it, but that was not the grounds used for this administrative disqualification hearing as recited in the Administrative Hearing Disqualification Notice for this hearing. See, Exhibit #3. I cannot bootstrap a separate violation of which no allegation or notice was made to sustain the original violation. Rather, an agency must allege an intentional violation of FS rules, notice the participant of the alleged violation, and establish the noticed violation at the hearing by the clear and convincing evidentiary standard. I can only conclude that the agency has not met the higher clear and convincing proof standard required on the violation alleged in the Notice. See, Exhibit #3.

Based upon the record before me, I cannot find that the petitioner has established by clear and convincing evidence that the respondent intentionally violated FS program rules. The violation is reversed.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The petitioner has not demonstrated by clear and convincing evidence that the respondent intentionally violated, and intended to violate, the FS program rule specifying that an FS recipient shall not knowingly transfer food coupons except to purchase food.
2. The intentional program violation alleged on May 18, 2016, must be reversed and rescinded.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is

ORDERED

That the petitioner's determination is reversed, and that the petitioner shall rescind the finding that the respondent committed a first IPV of the FoodShare program and cease all efforts to disqualify the respondent from the program. These actions shall be completed within 10 days of the date of this Decision.

REQUEST FOR A REHEARING ON GROUNDS OF GOOD CAUSE FOR FAILURE TO APPEAR

In instances where the good cause for failure to appear is based upon a showing of non-receipt of the hearing notice, the respondent has 30 days after the date of the written notice of the hearing decision to claim good cause for failure to appear. See 7 C.F.R. sec. 273.16(e)(4). Such a claim should be made in writing to the Division of Hearings and Appeals, P.O. Box 7875, Madison, WI 53707-7875.

APPEAL TO COURT

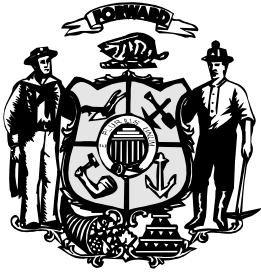
You may also appeal this decision to Circuit Court in the county where you live. Appeals must be filed with the Court **and** served either personally or by certified mail on the Secretary of the Department of Health Services, 1 West Wilson Street, Room 651, Madison, WI 53703, **and** on those identified in this decision as “PARTIES IN INTEREST” **no more than 30 days after the date of this decision** or 30 days after a denial of a timely rehearing request (if you request one).

The process for Circuit Court Appeals may be found at Wis. Stat. §§ 227.52 and 227.53. A copy of the statutes may be found online or at your local library or courthouse.

Given under my hand at the City of Madison,
Wisconsin, this 21st day of June, 2016

\sKenneth Duren
Administrative Law Judge
Division of Hearings and Appeals

c: Miles - email
Public Assistance Collection Unit - email
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability - email
[REDACTED] - email



State of Wisconsin\DIVISION OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS

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The preceding decision was sent to the following parties on June 21, 2016.

Milwaukee Enrollment Services
Public Assistance Collection Unit
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability
[REDACTED]